APPENDIX E

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING SUCCESSFUL CDBG APPLICATIONS

1. **Be sure to respond to and complete each requirement and application question.** Answer all parts of each ranking criterion. Address all ranking issues in each criterion.

2. **Make sure you understand the CDBG requirements and make sure you address all of them.** Thoroughly respond to each of the applicable ranking issues listed under the ranking criteria (those are the same ones the MDOC application ranking teams will be comparing your application against.) Montana's CDBG Application Guidelines try to clearly explain the basic requirements of the program and the ranking criteria that will be used to score your application. **If you have any questions or anything is unclear to you, call the Department of Commerce CDBG staff.** Don't wait until the last minute if you have any questions about the Application Guidelines.

3. **Set a definite schedule and checklist for completion of the various parts of the application. Approach the Application Guidelines step by step**. Put together a calendar to make sure you have the time to get all the required tasks done and schedule completion dates for each. **Approach the Application Guidelines step by step**.

4. **Arrange for an impartial review of the draft application.** A preliminary draft (and final drafts also) of the application should be reviewed by others (not CDBG staff) who are not closely involved with the application. Getting others involved can bring in a fresh perspective that may question some of your assumptions or see weaknesses that you cannot. They can serve as editors and raise questions or spot gaps or inconsistencies in your arguments (or lack of evidence for your statements) that you may not notice or be able to see because you are too close to the project to be aware of them. Have your local reviewers (friendly yet skeptical checkers) check your final draft. Make sure that all attachments that you need (exhibits, appendices) are included.

5. **If you are not sure whether a given requirement, criterion, or ranking issue applies to your project, contact CDBF staff to get a clarification.** Use the application guidelines as a checklist -- to make sure you address each question asked. If you are sure that a given requirement, criterion, or application ranking issue does not apply to your project, respond to that question with "N/A" (not applicable) and explain. If you're not sure – call CDBG.

6. **Form a Steering Committee or Task Force (committed to being familiar with the application guidelines) to review the work of your main grant writer.** While it often works best to have one person responsible for writing and assembling the application, preparation of a competitive CDBG application is usually not a one-person job. After you have determined which requirements will apply, break the tasks into individual assignments.

7. **If you were an unsuccessful applicant previously, make arrangements with Department of Commerce CDBG staff to review (in person) the ranking comments you received concerning your previous application.** Find out what specific areas need to be improved and make sure you understand what is needed to address the deficiencies cited. Because the application ranking process is based on a comparison of those submitted in a given year, there is no guarantee that your application will receive

the same score that it did the previous year. What were the differences in the successful applications from last year that caused them to be ranked higher? **You can borrow copies of successful applications for similar projects to get ideas on how to prepare a stronger application.** Even if your previous application received a maximum score on a particular criterion or ranking issue, review your response for this year's application to see if it can be strengthened.

8. **Take a holistic approach to describing your project**. The strongest applications often approach each of the ranking criteria as components of a coordinated, overall strategy rather than as separate and distinct responses to stand alone issues. Several of the CDBG ranking criteria consider interrelated issues, so keep all the ranking criteria in mind at each stage in preparing the overall application narrative. Be consistent. A key concept, such as citizen participation and public involvement (or your community's long-term approach to planning and managing public facilities) can be referenced and integrated throughout the application. If the narrative response to a given CDBG ranking criterion or application ranking issue flows from a previous discussion in your application, you don't have to repeat key information, but you should tell the CDBG review team where the issue has already been covered.

9. **Be clear, well-organized and logical in answering each of the questions asked in the guidelines. Make sure you include relevant, strong evidence for your key assertions.** Present your answers and narratives clearly and logically, showing how you get to your conclusions – remember you are trying to sell your project. Make sure (using local test readers) that it would not be difficult for the CDBG review team to follow the key points you are trying to make. Make sure that you present evidence (documentation) for your conclusions and all key assertions. Make sure that any exhibits you include really support your proposal.

10. **A well-organized application with a logical progression of ideas (and clearly labeled and easy to locate exhibits) makes it easier to understand the case you are making for your community.** Follow the suggested application format presented in Appendix D (Section B). Use the checklists that are provided in Appendix F and Appendix G (checklists for General and Special Requirements).

11. **Be complete. Tell the whole story. Remember you need to sell your project. Don't assume that the people who will review your application know your community or your situation. Your application must speak for itself and anticipate all the likely questions that might be asked.** The ranking teams will be composed of Department of Commerce staff that may not be familiar with your community or the details of your situation. Describe the circumstances clearly and thoroughly. You can accomplish this while still providing a simple and straightforward narrative that avoids unnecessary repetition.

12. **Document your community's support for your project.** The CDBG program encourages public involvement in both the preparation of and implementation of local CDBG projects. The support of residents and others in the surrounding community is critical, not only to your grant application, but also to your project's success. You can strengthen your application by including documents that show not only general community and citizen support for your project, but -- if appropriate -- offer and identify local resources that will help make the project a success (for example, contribution of in-kind services, funds, or volunteer efforts).